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## Know Your Risk Factors

### HIGH BLOOD CHOLESTEROL AND TRIGLYCERIDES

**Cholesterol is a soft, fat-like substance found in the bloodstream and in all your body's cells.**

Your body makes all the cholesterol it needs. The saturated fats, *trans* fats and cholesterol you eat may raise your blood cholesterol level.

#### ABOUT CHOLESTEROL

Having too much cholesterol in your blood increases your risk for heart disease and stroke. This happens because cholesterol and other fats can build up in the walls of arteries, narrowing the channel where the blood flows. If a narrowed artery gets blocked by a blood clot or other particle, the heart or brain loses its blood supply, resulting in a heart attack or stroke. About 45 percent of American adults have cholesterol levels that are too high (200 mg/dL or higher). About 1 in 6 has a level in the high-risk zone (240 mg/dL or higher). You should have your cholesterol levels checked regularly (at least once every five years starting at age 20).

#### UNDERSTANDING CHOLESTEROL LEVELS

Your **total blood cholesterol levels** is one measure of risk.

#### TOTAL BLOOD CHOLESTEROL LEVELS

- Less than 200 mg/dL is the desirable level and may indicate a lower risk of heart disease and stroke. The range of 200 to 239 mg/dL reflects borderline high (higher risk).
- A total cholesterol of 240 mg/dL and above reflects high blood cholesterol (more than twice the risk as desirable level).

#### HDL CHOLESTEROL RISK LEVELS

- HDL is "good" cholesterol because it seems to lower your risk of heart attack and stroke. Unlike other cholesterol levels, the higher your HDL, the better.
- Less than 50 mg/dL in women reflects having a low HDL (higher risk).
- The goal is >50 mg/dL in women (>40 mg/dL in men).
- HDL stands for high-density lipoprotein.

#### LDL CHOLESTEROL RISK LEVELS

- LDL stands for low-density lipoprotein. This is the main carrier of harmful cholesterol in your blood. A high level of LDL cholesterol means there's a higher risk of heart disease and stroke.
- Less than 100 mg/dL is considered optimal.
- A range of 100 to 129 mg/dL reflects above optimal risk.
- A range of 130 to 159 mg/dL reflects borderline high risk and 160 to 189 mg/dL is considered being at high risk.
- Very high risk is defined at 190 mg/dL or higher.



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#### TRIGLYCERIDES

Triglycerides are a type of fat in your body and also a major energy source. They come from food, and your body also makes them. As people get older, gain excess weight or both, their triglyceride levels tend to rise.

#### TRIGLYCERIDE RISK LEVELS

Less than 150 mg/dL = Normal

150 to 199 mg/dL = Borderline High

200 to 499 mg/dL = High

500 mg/dL and above = Very High

#### STEPS TO LOWER CHOLESTEROL

You can take the following steps to reduce your cholesterol:

- **Cut down on foods high in saturated fat** and cholesterol like fatty meats, butter, full-fat dairy products and egg yolks.
- **Enjoy at least 30 minutes of physical activity** on most or all days of the week.
- **Eat more foods low in saturated fat** and cholesterol, and high in fiber.
- **Lose weight if you need to.**
- **Ask your doctor about medicines** that can reduce cholesterol (not recommended for all patients).

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION

Talk to your doctor, nurse or other health care professional to understand your cholesterol levels. If you have heart disease or have had a stroke, members of your family also may be at higher risk. Learn your risk for heart attack and stroke by taking the Go Red Heart CheckUp at [GoRedForWomen.org](https://www.GoRedForWomen.org). To learn more facts about heart disease and how to reduce your risk, visit [GoRedForWomen.org/HeartHealthTools](https://www.GoRedForWomen.org/HeartHealthTools).

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[GoRedForWomen.org](https://www.GoRedForWomen.org)